

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by William Alexander Percy, Marjorie
Meeker, Glenn Ward Dresbach, Charles Whar-
ton Stork and Others — — — — —

Editorials by Carolyn Hall and Maxwell Anderson

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But Like Mad Builders . . .

BBETTER to tangle in the mesh
Of ordered time and circumstance,
Better permit the baffled flesh
Its native unbewildered trance,

And bow beneath accepted loads,
Than dream presumptuously in vain,
Pricking the heart with jeweled goads
Of hate like joy and joy like pain . . .

But like mad builders of proud ships
For harbors that are never known,
Always a few will dare the whips
Of outraged vigilance alone,

And set themselves up target-high
On any shaky eminence,
Filling the mute derisive sky
With shouts of careful insolence;

Thinking, perhaps, from sun to sun
The tiny echoes lift and fall
Till some remote oblivion
May shatter at the answering call.

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Walls

ASK me why I peer
Through such a narrow cranny—
I say that sky from here
Is better than not any.

The walls that shut me in
No mind can make immortal;
My harder will shall win
The yet unthought-of portal.

Ask why I take root
Where nothing green is growing—
I say that seed and shoot
Follow the mad wind's sowing;

But where these live roots turn
And thrust, no wall shall block:
Tendril of frailest fern
Can split a rock.

—*Marjorie Meeker*

A Picture of Indian Summer

A DRAGON-FLY poises on the finger-tip of Pierrot—
Summer languishes,
And autumn, as a mist, exudes from the world's far rim,
Staining the breasts of the mountains purple.
The breath of the valleys loosens the hair of the silver birch—
But, like a little Japanese lady, the sumac has bound her locks with
scarlet pins.

—*Abbott Fraser*

Though We Protest

THOUGH we protest, it will not be forever,
Only as long as shadows on the lawn
In the late fall, the winter night will never
Lift the frail witchery of dawn,
Only as long as gold autumnal twilight;
A gray day follows and the first snowfall,
The tips of gaunt trees scrawl on the skylight
And darkness ends it, ends it once for all.

Let us protest no further. Love will lie
With all things living underneath the snow,
Day after day will agedly creep by
And no ripe seed will lift its leaf to grow,
Nothing of all our passion will bear fruit;
Within our hearts a stillborn dream lies mute.

Dramatics

SOMETIMES I think we two enjoy scenes,
Like to act parts, say lines we do not feel,
Put on great wigs and rented robes to steal
On to the stage with artificial miens.
You play the lover, I, the maid who leans
Out from her casement, mouthing words unreal,
Something of love and danger, while you kneel
In attitude much studied from "the screens."

Yet when the curtain lowers, lights turn out,
When I have washed the paint and changed my gown,
I meet you at the darkened edge of town,
Forgetful of our drama and our doubt.
Together we walk home, you into me,
I into you, with deep sincerity.

—Eda Lou Walton

Rain Patter

THE lambs are sleeping in the rain
Cuddled two and two together,
One alone might sleep in pain
On the hillside in such weather.
In the spring rain slow and steady,
Just before the leaves are ready,
Walking is contentment's gain,
That is, walking with another,
Best a lover, then heart's brother—
All alone might waken pain.
Come then, dear, be wise again,
Ramble with me in the soft spring rain—
Walking is contentment's gain!
We'll see weeping willow's mane
Beaded with the moonstone rain,
Then the oat-field's emerald stain,
Then a brambled dripping lane
Where johnny-jump-ups, pert and plain,
Are common as the inch-high grain.
If walking's more than going's art
Unaided by curt car or cart,
Your eyes a thief, a sleuth your heart,
We'll find, I have no doubt at all,
Right in the cold wood's hollow cove
Branches of blurry pink I love—
(The red-bud always has his anguish out
Before the leaves are there to laugh and flout).
We'll surely see a red bird fall
And hear, if you'll not breathe at all,
The tentative self-conscious call
Of the young mockingbird who slyly
Practices what he sings not shyly
At windows and from garden borders
When what he sings is what he orders.
(But men have lived and died quite near

And never heard his muted fear,
So exquisite and faint and clear.)
What if I should show to you
A plum tree and a cherry too,
Both white as lilies Mary grew,
And hazed about with rain?
Oh, if we go as I like best,
Haphazardly and with a zest,
You'll have no need to seek for pleasure
In lands that other daytimes measure,
But every bush will be your treasure!
Come out, come out, be wise again
Before the spring begins to wane—
There's nothing gladder, I maintain,
Than walking together in the rain!

—*William Alexander Percy*

The Milkman's Boy

NO owl's cry fell upon him where he lay;
The folded sheep did not disturb his rest.
But from the valley where he walked that day
The whistle of a train shot through his breast.

The Cobbler's Daughter

TO kiss her while she faced the light
I bent my head across her sight,
So shut the moonlight from her eyes
And made them darker than the skies.

And now I think I cannot tell
Which spell I found the fairer spell,—
My lips on hers in that still place
Or moonlight softly on her face.

—*Stirling Bowen*

Dream Fear

I AM afraid to dream a dream at night,
While memory, moon-misted, walks in sleep
Through silences where none may laugh, or weep,
And all the little ghosts of things are white
As snow upon narcissus . . . There is death
In this dim silver fabric of forgetting,
Where pain is veiled, and there is no regretting,
And life comes quivering with every breath.

I'm glad you brought red roses to me here:
Wine-red and lovely,—riotous with earth;
When twilight comes, I'll keep them very near,
And try to think of you, and love, and birth . . .
For oh, I fear to dream a dream at night
When all the little ghosts of things are white!

Presence

SHE passes me in dim reluctant garments,
Older than any oldness I can know;
But her great eyes are bitter with young laughter,
And her pale hands are whiter than new snow.

I feel the shadows close upon her passing,
I feel her slow, dark brooding from the stair;
And all my heart goes forth with icy fingers,
And my young voice cries strangely to her there.

Still in my house, her cold arms move about me,—
Unhungering, aged arms that seek long rest;
But ah, her lips hold passionate, warm beauty,
And scarlet flowers tremble at her breast!

—*Ruth Lechlitrer*

To One Who Has Suffered

YOU have been unhappy, you say,
And I must believe it—
You, whose voice is a violet's thought
With a thrush's melody.
There have been clouds, you tell me.
But the sun does not know, I think,
How lovely is the light to us on earth,
How glory-drenched
The folds that vainly seek to veil his beams.

—*Charles Wharton Stork*

Worlds May Darken

WORLDS may darken,
Time may quench the sea,
One thing shall live—
Immortality.
All other life may pass,
Go to dust as last year's grass—
Yet, born of my pain,
One cry shall ring
Throughout eternity,
Stars may grow cold
While the centuries sing,
"You wanted me!
"You wanted me!"

—*Power Dalton*

Sorrow

A WOMAN stood on the moonlit sands
Gazing across the sea.
Teardrops fell on her waxen hands;
White as the moon was she.

White as the sand was the sleeping sea;
Pale were the woman's tears;
Wraithlike her shimmering hair blew free,
Long as a thousand years.

Slowly the tide like crystal tears
Curled on the moon-white sands;
Weaving hair like a thousand years
Over the wax-white hands.

Apprentice

LET me pass within
The vineyard gates, O Lord;
Surely there is a task
For unskilled hands to do;
A burden for
The willing back to which
The load gives strength.
I lift my eyes and see
The sunshine on the hills,
And from the vineyard comes
The voice of singing.
Let me labor with
Thy laborers and learn
The function of the vine.
Suffer that I may draw
The water, Lord, for those
Who tread the wine.

Leaves

THEY dance like dervishes across the fields
Who through the summer lazed in opulence,
And satiate with devotions of the sun
Bent coyly to caresses of the wind;
Who at the first sharp thrust of autumn's steel
Turned choleric faces to the cooling sun,
Hizzed at the wind, and sulked in pitying rain;
And rattling from a clasp no longer cordial
Renounced their puissant estate to run
Like lean ascetics through the windy dusk,
Impatient for the unction of the snow.

—Maud Elfrid Uschold

Road Song

GIVE me the sound of a morning sea.
The sea is a gorgeous lover with mist hair and lonely eyes.
But always let the feel of the road be on my feet.
The road is a pair of arms drawing the valley and the hills together.
The valley is a golden echoing, and the hills have the white
stillness of Shakespeare writing his last plays.

—Benjamin Rosenbaum

The Brook Under Ice

THIS brook has source far off in springs that flow
From depths of earth no season warms or chills
And, at the start, the crystal waters go
Arched only by the sky between the hills.
Then, where the waters chill, the ice begins
Its cold designs like strips of frozen sky
Above the brook whose song grows faint and thins
To whispered notes that, furtively, go by.

Here, where the bellowed eagerness of spring
Came from the floods, where summer's richness grew
To music, now the brook goes whispering,
Fearing that ice may strike it through and through . . .
And O, the blood that whispers under chill,
Urged on its way, at dreams, half singing still!

—Glenn Ward Dresbach

Answers

THERE are two kinds of answers. Those that spring
From deeper levels than our conscious thought
Setting our wise analysis at nought
By the avowal in that answering;
And those we take to be the honest truth
Deliberately testing out each word,
Allowing for our ignorance and youth
And for the sort of things that are inferred.
That may be truth but it is also art—
Truth unalloyed springs quickest from the heart.

Influence

I THINK that I shall always feel
Upon my plastic yielding thought
Your impress like a Roman seal
Stern-featured, deeply wrought.

The Illusionist

YES . . . there is wisdom in all that you say . .
Stop your explaining enchantment away!

Formula

DIP all thought
With your two hands
From that small spring
Which is your heart;
Then face-downward
Watch the sky
Reflected in
A silver gleam
Where seeps an inch
Of poetry
All crystal clear
And cold as truth
From secret earth
Into your heart.

—*Marie Emilie Gilchrist*

That Year

THAT year we hardly knew when summer went;
A whisper puffed the pampas—that was all—
And then the pines shook needles as they bent
And overnight the wild sea rice turned tall.
The ducks hung dark as thunder on the dune;
At night the foxes slyly crept the clear
And forest pools the summer held in swoon
Were troubled by the softly stepping deer.
Behind the cabin smoke ripe suns went down
Like gold satsumas dragging on the limb;
Until at last the world turned crusty brown
And one by one across the water's rim,

Like crumpled leaves along the yellow gloam
The fishing boats came slowly drifting home.

—*Mildred Plew Merryman*

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ACTING EDITOR: CAROLYN HALL

“Words As They Chanceably Fall From The Mouth”

IT is certainly doubtful whether anything written about poetry in the last three hundred and forty years could with greater felicity be given to young poets writing today than the following passage from Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*:

“I speak to show,” Sidney wrote in 1583, “that it is not riming and versing that maketh a poet—no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who, though he pleaded in armor, should be an advocate and no soldier—but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by. Although indeed the senate of poets hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them; not speaking, table-talk fashion, or like men in a dream, words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peizing each syllable of each word by just proportion, according to the dignity of the subject.”

Many of the poems that are sent in to *The Measure* and to the editors of other periodicals suffer from the fact that the poets are speaking “table-talk fashion, or like men in a dream, words as they chanceably fall from the mouth.” The sad part of it is that often

these chanceable words hold the germ of a good poem, if not a great one. There is nothing more tantalizing to an editor than to find in his submitted manuscripts an idea which thrills him or a subject which teases his own pen, laid out before him in words that are grave-clothes. In the case of poems it is not possible to do as one weekly magazine I know does with submitted editorials: if there is a good idea contributed they buy it even if they have to rewrite it entirely and pay the contributor the full rate as if he had written it himself. Poems, unfortunately perhaps, are at least half in "that delightful teaching" which goes by the name of technique, and a beautiful fresh idea avails little of itself.

Nevertheless I happen to know that during the editorship of one of the other members of the board of *The Measure*, a poem was sent in which in suggestion and idea so delighted the editor that he and his assistant made another poem of it, submitted this poem to the original poet and with her consent published it under her signature. This has happened only once in the experience of the magazine. Ordinarily the mails are burdened with chanceable words sent back to where they came from.

Now and then a poem appears on an editor's desk which is a startling example of words perfectly handled, of the never exhausted possibilities of etymology and of the effects procurable through extreme delicacy of arrangement. A poem which appeared in the October, 1921, issue of *The Measure* will show what I mean. I should prefer to quote a poem by someone not connected with the magazine editorially, but Kenneth Alling's "Stones Gathered for a Chimney" is the best illustration of my point I can find in the files, and since it was published two years before Mr. Alling became an editor of *The Measure*, in the days when he was first appearing in print, it seems permissible to use it.

These are less soluble in time,
that slow, slow acid,
than you or I or any of the tall trees here:—
these gray faced stoics
come out of earth's wind opened caves.
They know a dull endurance:
a harsh undissipated life is in them,
like night in an abyss.
They learned resistance in that early thunder blow
which split the universe to separate stars,—
and you and I who go
above them now
shall shortly lie below.

Sidney, I think, would himself have called that poetry, although it could so easily have been uninteresting, ineffectual and out of hand. Instead it is, almost as much as Henley's "Margaritae Sorori," an example of what a poem can be without the conventional use of rhyme and metre.

"It is not riming or versing that maketh a poet," Sidney wrote in the year that Stratford-on-Avon was considering William Shakespeare as the new father of a little girl, Susanna, a good two years before that father went to London to try his fortune and astound the world. The opinion of a predecessor of Shakespeare should carry some weight with that large part of the public which has so vehemently decried "modern poetry." As a matter of fact this public, as well as the young poets, could do worse than read, or reread, the whole of Sidney's *Defense*. It might help toward establishing a common ground for criticism. It might go a little way toward removing prejudices, as Longfellow once hoped it would. "It will be read with delight by all who have a taste for the beauties of poetry," Longfellow wrote in the *North American Review* for January, 1832, "and may go far to remove the prejudices of those who have not." At all odds, surviving the centuries as it has, the book should be in the library of everyone who associates himself with literature.

—Carolyn Hall.

New York's Theatre

The stage as an amusement and the stage as artistic expression are two different things which must merge before there can be a national theatre of any significance. If an art is to be national in scope it must capture the people, and if it is to possess enduring value it must capture them with something more than tricks and color displays. In this country, at present, there is a theatre built of tricks and tinsel with a few honest endeavorers trying once in a while to say something that sounds true and seldom getting away with it.

Perhaps it is impossible to create an artistic theatre in the United States just yet because of the lack of following for the project. The theatre, for better or worse, and mostly for worse, is in New York. A theatre in the middle west or in the south would be much more authentic. It would be nearer the soil, less sophisticated, less bored,

less interested in the nastier aspects of sex, more interested in purely comic and tragic crises. Life as seen in the New York theatre is heightened and brightened to please the jaded palate of people whose daily life is already over-hecktic. It is constructed to please audiences that long ago got over the naive love of looking in through the fourth wall of an imaginary neighbor's room, audiences that want to be tickled and astonished alternately by the jugglery of an adroit psychologist. The tricks for doing that are well known; they almost always work. Nearly all plays are written around them, written with the tricks as the central theme and plot or character deliniation as secondary or vestigial.

It is true that tricks have always been used in the theatre. They were used by Sophocles and by Shakespeare, by Moliere and Ibsen. But when tricks take the place of life the product of the dramatist ceases to be worth saving. In the work of all the masters life comes first, or the semblance of life, while the trick is hidden skeleton-like under flesh and blood.

This is not to say that the greatest drama is realistic or nationalistic. It is not. There is no such thing as realism on the stage. Action and speech in a play must be calculated to give an impression of actual existence while crowding a lifetime of utterance, emotion and conflict into the allotted two hours. To hold the attention, a play must be devised, as life is never devised, to run through a narrowing channel to climactic overflow. To reveal character it must strip away masks as they are seldom stripped in civilized societies. But so long as the emphasis is on life and the meaning of life it does not matter that life as we see it about us is not duplicated. There would be no sense in such duplication. We can see existence anywhere. It is something above experience; transcending the limitations of the habitual mile-stone of everyday, that we want in comedy or tragedy.

Or, if that is not what we want, it is at least what great audiences have wanted, in centuries when great plays were written. Even now there is an audience for such things, but it is not the typical audience. The great rewards are given for tricks, for emotional tickling in the ribs and new sensations. The New York public in the main does not come to the theatre to watch man struggling with destiny or society. It comes to be amused—most of the time, or it comes to weep or giggle or be delicately shocked. It is a soft-headed and soft-hearted public. Nearly all the plays it really cares for are soft-headed and

full of mush. If there are to be great plays there must be audiences that have iron in their blood and a general point of view. Boys and girls alike seem to have emerged from the war with the generalizing faculties paralyzed and no philosophy. Their eyes and ears are quick. They like sleight-of-hand or sleight-of-word. They like recognizable particulars in parody or burlesqued. Such stuff is trash because it doesn't last. The only proof of virtue is endurance, and tricks are for today only.

—Maxwell Anderson

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The Measure

A Journal of Poetry

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State of New Jersey, } ss.
County of Union,

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Carolyn Hall, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes, and says that she is the business manager of The Measure, A Journal of Poetry, and that the following is, to the best of her knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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(My commission expires 1928).